

Report to the Board of Education
Resources Available to School Divisions to Address School Safety
January 2013

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provides technical assistance and information to school divisions on school safety, including prevention of violence in and around schools; crisis and emergency response; provision of guidelines, such as those for student conduct; collection of data on incidents of discipline, crime, and violence in schools; and promotion of a safe and positive school environment through such programs as bullying prevention and student assistance programming. Resources accessible from the VDOE Web site include guidance documents, model programs and policies, and links to information, materials, and training opportunities from state and national sources.

VDOE has a strong collaborative working relationship with the Virginia Center on School Safety (VCSS) of the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). The Center was created in 2000 by the General Assembly through the *Code of Virginia* at [§9.1-184](#) to provide training and technical assistance for Virginia public school personnel in school safety; to be a resource and referral center for Virginia schools; to disseminate information and conduct research and collect data; and to maintain the certification of school employees as regards safety concerns. VCSS is responsible for the annual *Virginia School Safety Audit Survey* conducted to collect information about school safety assessments from school divisions.

Of importance is the establishment of the Governor's School Safety Task Force on December 17, 2012 through Executive Order 56. The Governor announced that the task force will be comprised of leading educators, public safety experts, local leaders and legislators to review school safety, including established policies and procedures, crisis and emergency management plans, communications procedures, as well as to share best practices and identify resource challenges. This task force will also provide legislative and budget proposals to the Governor to address any critical gaps or needs associated with safety and security in schools.

The following information is a summary of school safety resources, including the School Safety Audit and its latest published findings.

Guidance Documents and Model Policies

Resource Guide: Crisis Management and Emergency Response in Virginia Schools (2007) is a publication of the Virginia Department of Education. Developed in 1996 by VDOE, the original *Resource Guide for Crisis Management in Schools* has been revised and updated several times, most recently in 2006, to respond to the Virginia General Assembly's legislative requirement adding medical emergency response to the crisis management plans required of all school divisions and schools (§ 22.1-279.8.D of the *Code of Virginia*). Approved by the Virginia

Board of Education on November 29, 2007, the comprehensive *Resource Guide for Crisis Management and Emergency Response in Virginia Schools* provides the following information:

1. Using This Guide in the Current Context of Crisis Management Planning
2. Steps in Developing a Crisis Plan
3. Non-Emergency School Crises
4. Medical Emergencies
5. Critical Incidents and Emergencies
6. Communications
7. New Challenges in Crises Planning
8. Quick-Reference Responses to Emergencies
9. Tools for Crisis Management and Emergency Response Planning
10. Resources

The guide is available at the VDOE Web site for Emergency and Crisis Management:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/safety_crisis_management/emergency_crisis_management/index.shtml

The Model School Crisis Management Plan was developed in 1999 and revised in 2002, in consultation with school divisions and VCSS, as required by the *Code* at §22.1-279.8.D. It provides policies, procedures, and forms that may be adapted to meet local needs in the areas of: preparation for crisis; identification and intervention with students who may present a potential threat; and response to events impacting the school, both critical and those not presenting a serious threat. This guidance is available from the VDOE Emergency and Crisis Management Web site shown above.

The Virginia Educator's Guide for Planning and Conducting School Emergency Drills (2001), a publication produced by VDOE and DCJS, provides guidance to school division officials on legal requirements for drills, assessment of need to ensure emergency preparedness, and the appropriate protocol for planning and conducting school emergency drills. The Board of Education regulations for school facilities and safety at 8VAC20-131-260 B.2. require that fire drills be held at least once a week during the first month of school and at least once each month for the remainder of the school term. The regulations also require at least one simulated lock-down and crisis emergency evacuation activity to be conducted early in the school year. This guide is available from the VDOE Emergency and Crisis Management Web site shown above.

Guidelines for the Development of Policies and Procedures for Managing Student Behaviors in Emergency Situations in Virginia Public Schools (2009) provide assistance to school divisions and public school programs in Virginia for developing policies and procedures for

physical restraint and seclusion of students in emergency situations. This guidance is available on the VDOE Web site addressing student conduct:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_conduct/index.shtml

The Elementary School Gun Safety Guidelines and Curriculum (2011) was developed in accordance with § 22.1-204.1. of the *Code of Virginia*, which states that school boards may provide firearm safety education programs for students in elementary school. To assist local school boards electing to provide firearm safety education programs, the Board of Education “shall establish curriculum guidelines for a standardized program of firearm safety education for the elementary school grades to promote the protection and safety of children enrolled in the public schools.”

The guidelines may be found at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/safety_crisis_management/gun_safety/index.shtml

The Student Conduct Policy Guidelines (2009) were first developed in 1994 in response to action by the 1993 General Assembly requiring the Virginia Board of Education to establish guidelines to aid school boards in implementing student conduct policies. In 2004, the *Guidelines* were revised in response to requirements of § 22.1-279.6. of the *Code of Virginia*, to reflect changes in state and federal laws and regulations and best practice principles. The revised *Virginia Student Conduct Policy Guidelines* were adopted by the Virginia Board of Education in 2004, and have been updated in 2005, 2006, and 2009 to incorporate changes in state laws and regulations. The guidelines present standards, consistent with state, federal and case laws, for school board policies, including those on alcohol and drugs, gang-related activity, hazing, vandalism, trespassing, threats, search and seizure, disciplining of students with disabilities, intentional injury of others, self-defense, and bullying. Local school boards are required to adopt and revise regulations on codes of student conduct that are consistent with, but may be more stringent than, these guidelines.

The guidelines can be accessed and/or downloaded at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/guidance/safety/student_conduct.pdf

A Model Policy Against Bullying is in the final stages of review by VDOE and will be made available to school divisions via the VDOE Web site. The model policy is comprehensive and includes: (1) definitions of bullying and related terms and identification of bullying issues; (2) strategies to prevent bullying, including education, training, and information collection and dissemination; (3) investigation and responding to bullying incidents, including reporting and notification; and (4) sample forms.

Guidelines and Resources for Internet Safety in Schools (2007) is one of several resources provided by VDOE to promote safe use of the internet and acceptable use policies. Virginia public schools provide age-appropriate instruction in Internet safety, and school divisions are required to develop acceptable Internet use policies in accordance with *Code* § 22.1-70.2. VDOE has developed guidelines for instructional programs related to Internet safety and provides

technical assistance to school divisions in the development of policies to protect children from cyberbullying, online abuse, and other dangers.

The guidelines may be accessed from:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/safety_crisis_management/internet_safety/index.shtml

The Student Assistance Programming Manual has been completed and is being prepared for posting on the VDOE Web site. Student Assistance Programming (SAP) is a systemic approach to linking students to behavioral health care education, programs, and services in the school and in the community. It provides a framework and a process for social, emotional, and mental health support for all students and intervention for those that need it. The manual provides comprehensive information and guidance on the development, organization, and implementation of SAP with community partners.

Informational Reports

The Annual Report of Discipline, Crime and Violence presents statistics on the incidents of discipline, crime, and violence which are reported to the VDOE from each school division in accordance with § 22.1-279.3:1 of the *Code of Virginia*. The reporting process employs a well-defined set of data consistent with the National Center for Education Statistics. Incidents range from criminal acts that result in law enforcement action to minor acts of misbehavior. The data can be used by school divisions to identify specific areas of focus to improve school safety and prevention programming and implementation. The data are used also to provide information required by the *Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994* for reporting of the number of students suspended or expelled statewide for possessing or bringing firearms on school property, and for the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, which requires reporting disciplinary action involving students with disabilities.

The report may be accessed from the VDOE Web site at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/school_climate/discipline_crime_violence/10_annual_report.pdf

The Annual Virginia School Safety Audit Survey is conducted by the Virginia School Safety Center (VCSS) of DCJS, in cooperation with VDOE and in accordance with *Code* §§ 22.1-279.8.B. and 9.1-184. Since 1997, school boards have been required to ensure that all schools in their respective divisions complete the audit. In 2005, responsibility for conducting the survey and collection and analysis of information submitted was transferred to DCJS through legislation. VCSS develops the questions and items for the survey and receives completed audits through school division superintendents. The purpose of the audit is to assess safety conditions in schools, including crisis and emergency management planning, safety concerns of students

and staff, school security and surveillance, gang activity, and disciplinary infractions and responses. The results of the *School Safety Audit Survey* are published every year.

Annual reports may be found on the DCJS Web site at <http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/audit/index.cfm>.

Major findings from the 2010-2011 School Survey are:

- The 2010-2011 Safety Audit Survey was completed by 100 percent of the 1,980 Virginia public schools.
- Approximately one-fifth (19 percent, 366) of schools reported that they activated some portion of their crisis management plan during the 2010-2011 school year due to an actual emergency (not including weather-related activations). The most common reason for activation was an incident occurring off school grounds in the community, such as a crime or accident.
- A large majority of schools (91 percent, 1,798) had an automated Electronic Notification System (ENS) that notifies parents/guardians when there is an emergency at the school.
- A large majority of schools (78 percent, 1,552) reported using a formal threat assessment process to respond to student threats of violence.
- Schools reported an average of 4.6 prevention programs from a list of common types of programs. The most commonly reported prevention effort in all schools was a mentoring program, implemented in 73 percent (1,443) of schools. The other most commonly reported prevention efforts were anonymous reporting of safety concerns (68 percent, 1,337), conflict resolution programs (66 percent, 1,303), and substance abuse prevention programs (66 percent, 1,298).
- Nearly all Virginia schools (98 percent) reported that they made a special effort to reduce bullying last year. Formal bullying prevention programs were reported by 893 schools. The most common elements of bullying prevention efforts were counseling services, communication of rules against bullying to all students, increased supervision of areas where bullying occurs, class meetings about bullying, and disciplinary consequences for bullying.
- Thirty-six percent (755) of schools reported that they distributed a questionnaire to students during the year to assess school safety.

- The majority of schools reported practicing lockdown drills once every four months.

Other Resources

VCSS Publications. In addition to publishing the results of the annual School Safety Audit, VCSS develops documents to support school safety, such as the *Juvenile Handbook for School Administrators*; the *Virginia Rules Program: Law-Related Education Curriculum*; *School Crisis Plan Generator Software*; a *Campus Threat Assessment Team Curriculum*; and a *School Resource Officer Curriculum*.

Links to U.S. Department of Education and other state and national Web sites are provided to school divisions through e-mail notifications and from the VDOE Web site. These include the federal government's stopbullying.gov and the University of Virginia Curry School of Education's youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu.

Training. Training for school division personnel offered by VDOE to support school safety over the last four years has included regional workshops on crisis management, workshops on the collection and use of discipline, crime, and violence data, student assistance programming, and bullying prevention. In October 2012 the U.S. Department of Education provided training in "Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools" in Fishersville, Virginia. Also in 2012, VDOE worked with the University of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Health, and DCJS to provide an institute on understanding and preventing bullying and promoting a positive school climate; presented a one-day institute via video-stream on conditions for learning, including school climate, and supported DCJS in planning the Superintendents-Law Enforcement Forum "Public School and Public Safety Partnerships: A Conversation to Address the Impact of Community Violence on Schools."